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ABSTRACT

The 1975-76 school year is the first year in which the Department of Educational Administration at the State University of New York at Buffalo has in experimental operation its redesigned program for preparing persons for a broad spectrum of positions in educational administration. The program serves as the vehicle for three degree programs and for New York certification in administration. Five levels of a cognitive sequence are organized into three program components. Component 1, Common Learnings, emphasizes knowing, recalling, and having access to specifics, and understanding, translating, discussing, and interpreting material. Component 2, the Concentrations, emphasizes analyzing and separating a whole into parts, making interrelationships clear, and synthesizing and combining elements into new entities. Component 3 emphasizes evaluating and ascertaining relevance for action. This last component calls for a major individual contribution to knowledge or practice. (Author/IRT)

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Preparatory Program at SUNY Buffalo: A Report of Experience

by
Oliver Gibson and Marilyn Stetar

1975-76 marks the first year in which the Department of Educational Administration at the State University of New York at Buffalo has in experimental operation its redesigned program for preparing persons for a broad spectrum of positions in educational administration. The program serves as the vehicle for three degree programs and for New York State Certification in administration. Students are accepted into the 32 hour Ed. M. program, the Ed.D. program which emphasizes the practitioner's role, the Ph.D. which emphasizes research and teaching, and the Specialist in Educational Administration, a 60-hour program which leads to certification as a School District Administrator.

Redesign Process

The effort began in the late 1960's as the expanding knowledge base in educational administration, the growing complexity of the educational environment, and the increasingly diverse career needs and aspirations of our students outpaced the capacity of the existing program to provide first-rate academic preparation. The continuous addition of new courses was rejected early on as a strategy of reform - partly because this was thought likely to result in an academic Topsy, but largely because the presence of seven new staff members and a change in the chairmanship presented conditions appropriate for a major revamping. Another influence with major ramifications was the growing number of change-oriented students in the Department and the supportive environment created by student-faculty dialogue during the entire period.

The change effort initiated then lasted for the better part of seven years and has resulted in a program which fosters the current mission and goals of the Department and advances the principles of scientific humanism in education.

The redesign effort moved through several developmental stages of increasingly formal structure. In 1969, students and faculty members met occasionally to discuss the overall program and the relevance it had for students' career objectives. It was immediately apparent that both students and faculty wanted to explore alternative possibilities for several reasons.

Oliver Gibson

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First, the new faculty members had diverse and cosmopolitan backgrounds, and the existing program allowed them little room for developing new and non-traditional approaches to the study of educational administration. Too, students tended to be younger and were, for the most part, beginning their professional preparation before serving as administrators (rather than concurrently as had long been the case), and were more idealistic in their views of the breadth of preparation needed. The discussion, starting from these informal meetings, evolved into Department seminars which provided a forum for program critique, later a special credit-bearing Program Re-Design seminar was established which enabled the dialogue process to expand and, at the same time, reduced some of the time constraints and conflicts increasingly apparent for both students and staff.

At about the same time arrangements were made for one faculty member to devote half of his teaching time to steering efforts. The seminars were supplemented by a series of off-campus retreats for both faculty and students at the close of each semester. Out of these various gatherings came a flow of critical thinking, extended discussion, and working position papers which documented the evolution of our thinking and helped us to crystallize our priorities and our final recommendations. By the fall of 1972, modules were being introduced for the first component; by 1973 the concentrations were taking shape, and by 1975-76 the total program became operational.

Program Conceptualization

The focal point for our early efforts was a revised statement of departmental mission:

> To produce graduates who possess *intellectual* and *performance* skills which result in superior accomplishment in *leadership* roles in *educational administration.*

The italicized terms were assumed to be the key elements in the mission statement and, as such, were to be directly related to the new program. This assumption implied that intellectual and performance skills would be developed concomitantly in the program and that each would need to be evaluated for its contribution to the overall goal of superior accomplishment among graduates.

It was clear from the outset that a program of educational preparation directed toward preparing persons for performance in roles of educational leadership is faced with the reality of pervasive social change. While these changes affect persons in all walks of life, there is bound to be greater impact upon those in positions of greater social visibility and concern. Thus the spotlight of social responsibility was thought to rest upon those persons holding administrative and supervisory responsibility for educational systems. Society has the right to expect competent performance in those positions; the university and the state have the obligation to assure it as far as is humanly possible. Under these circumstances, competent administrative behavior could not be a matter of copying conventional behavior. To advance education, we recognized a clear need for the ability to comprehend the dynamics of human affairs as a basis for relevant action under novel conditions, the need for better understanding of issues and processes in educational institutions, and the need for greater originality in designing administrative strategies.

When enrollments were increasing, growing numbers of school administrators were called for. While it now appears that *intensive* growth of educational needs during the first two and a half decades of life is decreasing, the nature of social change impels *extensive* development of educational opportunities across the life span. Thus there appears to be a decreasing need for traditional school administrators together with an increasing diversity in emerging positions. In every sector, more efficient and creative use of existing resources is called for.

We recognized also the concomitant shifts in career patterns. A young person may start as a vice principal and hold a vareity of positions of increasing responsibility during the decades of his or her career. The person who enters educational administration in 1975 at age 30 will retire in 2010. What manner of professional education is needed to assure competency? Is it enough to know today's issues and problems and their remedies? Surely not. The need seems to be for systematic provision for depth in content, particularly in power of *analytic method,* and for flexibility in adapting to a variety of individual interests and social needs, together with an understanding of shifting social issues and developments.

Competent leadership has been a matter of human reflection and analysis for centuries and has come under empirical study in recent decades. The broad generalization that has emerged from that study is the view of leadership as a social process involving the interaction of the leader with the situation both objectively and subjectively. Such a view has already anticipated in the behavior of the Duke of Wellington as reported by Sir Arthur Bryant in *The Great Duke.*

> As with all great soldiers, action worked on him like a tonic, sharpening the edge of his cool, incisive mind. In the field his temper grew calmer as storms arose. Then his strong common sense acquired the quality of genius. It was this which enabled him to forecast with such accuracy his enemies' movements; to guess what was "on the other side of the hill"; to do what he defined as the main business of life - finding out what he did not know by what he did.

In sum, that competence seems to include the ability (1) to see into the other side of the present, (2) to see into the intentions of others, and (3) to act in such a way as to make action more insightful and more effective. Clearly, however, there is much yet to know about the dynamics of human leadership; the approach needs still to be hypothetical and open-ended so that more may be learned by what is done. Thus the working hypothesis of the program is that leadership in educational administrative action involves:

1. the capacity to comprehend future states of affairs (objective contest) that are better for people (human contest), and
2. the ability to devise patterns of means (or strategies) that lead to those desirable states of affairs in education (action domain)

Specific objectives were formulated for the objective and human contexts of action, which form the cognitive sequence, and for the action domain which is the clinical sequence. These are:

1. Objective Contexts of Action
   Graduates will be expected to
   - be equipped to make contributions which further the development and application of knowledge relating to educational administration;
   - possess necessary skills for effective group interaction;

- possess performance skills which enable them to use a broad range of systematic approaches for the manipulation of environments relevant to education;
- be able to predict future states;
- possess the skills to set goals.

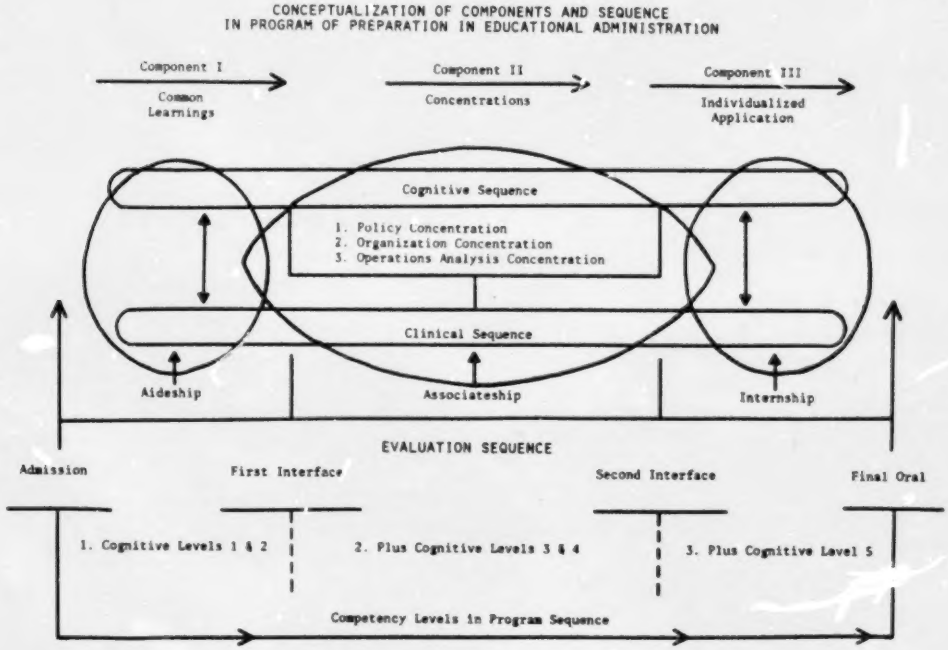
2. Human Contexts of Action
   - be self-actualizing, regarding education as an integral life activity;
   - possess knowledge of appropriate conceptual frameworks;
   - demonstrate creative imagination;
   - recognize the importance of ethical considerations in administrative decision-making;
   - demonstrate a concern for humanness and the release of human potential;
   - be able to communicate effectively;
   - possess the skills to set priorities.
3. Action Domain
   - have the ability to relate theory to practice;
   - be capable of coping with an increasing rate of cultural change;
   - possess performance skills for effective movement toward goals;
   - be able to evaluate the processes and outcomes of educational organizations;
   - be able to influence future states.

The above objectives run through the program in sequences of educational activities in the program. The general program design is represented in the accompanying diagram.

The first two areas (objective and human) are thought of as the *cognitive sequence*, the last is thought of as the *performance sequence*. Knowledge without skill in application in in danger of what has been called "mental dry rot"; performance without the guidance of knowledge is in danger of blindness. Thus the parallel development of the cognitive and performance sequence is seen as a dialectical interrelationship. As students progress in the cognitive sequence, they are expected to demonstrate growth in cognitive competence along the following five levels:

1. know, recall, have access to specifics,
2. understand, translate, discuss and interpret material,
3. analyze, separate whole into parts, making the interrelationships clear,
4. sythesize, combine elements into new entities,
5. evaluate, ascertain relevance for action.

While the above levels of cognitive development are useful for analytic purposes, they clearly overlap and are interrelated in numerous ways. For purposes of program organization, the first two levels are given primary emphasis in the first part of the program, known as Component I or Common Learnings; the next two levels are emphasized in the second part, known as Component II or the Concentrations; these lead to a culminating internship and seminar related to level five, Component III, the major individual contribution to knowledge or practice. At the interfaces between the Components occur the first and second diagnostic appraisals.



The Program

These three Components were conceptualized rather early in the redesign process. Because there are overlapping needs for knowledge and skills in all leadership roles, the Common Learnings (Component I) was designed to emphasize intellectual and performance competency at cognitive levels one and two as detailed above.

One-credit-hour modules presenting basic knowledge in the several areas and providing extensive bibliographic references were designed. The Common Learnings component also includes the introductory course of each of the three concentrations. They serve to acquaint all students with the basic concerns and issues and the common methods of research in each concentration. Each student is also expected to develop understanding of the use of theory-based method.

The Concentrations, (Component II) were designed in recognition of the likelihood that students entering the field of educational administration in the years immediately ahead will fill a variety of roles over the course of their careers. The concept of specialization according to existing organizational roles was thought incompatible with the breadth and flexibility required for long range career development. We, therefore, arranged

specializations according to broad areas of administrative action: *educational policy,* dealing with values and priorities, future states of affairs, information processing, and social coding systems; *educational organizations* dealing with systems behaviour, communication skills, and role interactions; and *operations analysis,* dealing with data analysis, resource development, and performance appraisal. The major proportion of each student's work in the Department is taken in conjunction with a field of concentration. In addition, a minor field related to the concentration, but outside the Department, is required of all students and is often taken in such areas as policy studies, management, or social psychology.

In the Individual/Unique Contribution (Component III) the student is expected to make an original contribution to knowledge about educational organizations, the administration of educational institutions, or the development and implementation of educational policy. The contribution is judged on three criteria: (1) conceptual, (2) methodological and (3) evaluative/interpretive. Because students anticipate this step from the outset and need a broad base of knowledge and practical experience, the individual concentrations endeavor to provide opportunities for the development of special interests through a variety of field activities dealing with pertinent topics at an advanced level. Students are, therefore, included in numerous local consulting projects taken on by the concentrations and by individual faculty.

Diagnostic Assessment

Evaluation of performance and individual progress is accomplished, as already stated, through two diagnostic assessment procedures called interfaces. The first interface is, in essence, like a legal brief in which the student presents arguments and justifications for his or her claim to competence up to Level 2 (know and understand) in the competency areas. The evidence, both oral and written, is weighed by a panel of three members: the student's advisor, another faculty member, and another student. The major aim here is to provide guidance to the student regarding the strength or weakness of the case and advice on how deficiencies can be overcome either through additional coursework or through independent study.

The second interface occurs toward the end of the concentration experiences and is intended to assess competence up to Level 4 (analyze and synthesize). The diagnosis centers upon a "think piece," prepared by the student in consultation with a committee, aimed at demonstrating competence at the level of analysis and synthesis.

Clinical Sequence

The clinical elements of the program have been alluded to but deserve special attention in that they are designed to provide for a systematic approach to increasingly complex problems of educational administration. The clinical sequence is taken as a series of three steps: the aideship, the associateship, and the internship, with a corresponding increase in individual responsibility for outcomes. Since the integration of theory and practice is the primary goal of the clinical sequence, the Department holds a series of seminars which parallel the field experiences and provide a forum for the discussion of problems and

strategies. Other goals for the clinical sequence include the provision of 1) opportunities for testing and practicing performance skills, 2) opportunities for testing theoretical knowledge in specific situations, and 3) opportunities for satisfying individual interests and meeting individual learning needs and objectives.

Advisement

Although it is departmental policy to allow each student maximum flexibility in developing a program which meets individual career needs and plans, a central requirement throughout a student's tenure in the Department is participation in the advisement process. This involves both an **admission advisor** who assists a student at the outset, and later a **program advisor** who plays a major role in the planning and development of the student's program. Ideally, we see the relationship as one built upon a common interest of scholarship in an area which enhances the professional development of both the student and the advisor. In addition, while the student works most closely with the program advisor, it is to be expected that student interests will cut across those of several faculty members and relationships among students and faculty which complement the advisor role are encouraged.

Conclusion

At this point it is our impression that a number of changes have taken place which we attribute to the qualitative differences between the former program and our present one. The planning process now centers in a steering committee which makes many of the decisions which once required the involvement of the entire faculty. In addition, the faculty clusters which constitute the concentrations have tended to reinforce the efforts of individuals in developing specific research projects and demonstrations.

Among our students, a renewed sense of involvement and responsibility for individual program planning and justification is evident. We seem to attract increasing numbers of students for whom the opportunity to participate actively in their professional development is seen as a unique opportunity.

We view the current year as a beginning in several ways. It is the first full year of total program operation, but it is also the real beginning of the evaluation process. We have denied ourselves the comforting assumption that the upheaval is finally over and a bit of resting on our collective laurels is in order.

Our present evaluation strategy is three-pronged. First, stringent effort will be made by the faculty collectively to assess the 'fit' between our stated goals and objectives and the individual courses and modules which are thought to advance them. Feedback from our colleagues in the field, a useful element in the design process, becomes even more important now as our students become staff members and the products of their skills become available for evaluation in the field. Then too, because the redesign process was to provide students with a skill-oriented, rather than a role-oriented professional program, we will look for increasing variety in the types of roles future graduates will fill. Lastly, since a primary overall objective of the program was the fostering of leadership among our students, we will look for increasing concrete evidence of superior accomplishment among our future graduates in the field of educational administration. □